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AUTHOR Gibson, Gwendolyn D.
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ABSTRACT

This document reports on the Chicago public high school improvement plans for the 1990-91 school year submitted during the summer of 1990 in response to the Chicago Public Schools Reform Act of 1988 (PA85-1418). Following background information on Chicago's public high schools, the purpose of PA85-1418 is explained as well as improvement plan funding and review format. The 20 required goals in the improvement plans are categorized and explored under 5 topics: (1) academic goals; (2) student self-discipline and motivation goals; (3) high school transition goals; (4) teacher professionalism; and (5) parent and community involvement goals. The percentages of schools addressing each goal are included, and the various methods used to address each goal are mentioned. The impact of the first year of the plans on high school students' learning is discussed, with emphasis on social influences, political influences, and changing educational practices. Last, the implications of the school improvement planning process are explored. Appended are a review form for the 1990-91 improvement plans; goals for the school improvement plan; a budget worksheet; a flow chart of the systemwide planning process; and a suggested timeline. (21 references) (CLA)

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SYMPOSIUM RESPONSE TO SCHOOL REFORM
CHICAGO PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS' IMPROVEMENT PLANS:
IMPROVING STUDENTS' LEARNING

By
GWENDOLYN D. GIBSON

APRIL 5, 1991

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CHICAGO PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS' IMPROVEMENT
PLANS: IMPROVING STUDENTS' LEARNING

This paper is a review, analysis and discussion of the Chicago public high school improvement plans that were submitted during the summer of 1990, for the 1990 -91 school year.

INTRODUCTION: THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN CONCEPT

Since the Chicago public school strike of 1987 and former Mayor Harold Washington's death, there have been few dull moments in the Chicago public schools. Chicago school reform has certainly made a radical change in how its local schools are managed.

PA85-1418, the Chicago Public Schools Reform Act of 1988, was developed by diverse groups of people armed with their own agendas, ideas biases, and motives. However, their combined efforts and input from the many Chicago citizens who attended the neighborhood school reform summit meetings held throughout the city helped shape the form and content of the law.

PA85-1418 focused on several major aspects of education in the system: governance, curriculum and instruction, budget, parent and community involvement, professional development, student performance and support services, i.e. maintenance and food service. The structures established to develop policy for these activities are the local school

councils. They are comprised of six parents, two community residents, two teachers, and the principal. The vehicle designated by the law as the organizational instrument for change is the school improvement plan (PA85-1418, 1989).

Conceptually, the school improvement plan was designed to be the major vehicle for raising the educational quality of the local schools and supporting the system's new decentralization process. This document was intended to integrate the purpose and activities (educational and support) of the individual school, as well as the physical facilities needs of each school. The school improvement plan developed by each individual school would also link state and local school mandates to local school missions and initiatives.

One must realize, however, that improving schools is much more complex than applying formulas, administering more achievement tests and other formal assessments, and filling in charts and checklists. Louis and Matthews (1990) noted that there are risks involved in change and school improvement, and those risks are particularly great for urban high schools. They further noted that real school improvement comes from succeeding in transforming practices and ideas into the "real life of the school. Translating this to Chicago public high schools, one might suspect that the majority of the schools are probably overwhelmed with the task of where and how to begin the process of change.

"WHOSE HIGH SCHOOLS ARE THESE ANYWAY?"

Chicago public high schools offer many programs to their 102,868 students. There are sixty-five high schools serving the general high school population and nineteen schools serving students with special needs.

The high schools serving the general population are categorized as general/technical (63%), magnet (15.3%), vocational (12.3%), and community academy schools (9.2%) In addition, the schools may have specialized programs called Options for Knowledge, which feature unique, special and creative educational classes designed to attract students from various Chicago neighborhoods.

Like many large urban areas, Chicago high schools are culturally diverse. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of the high school students are African-American; 25% Hispanic-American; 12% European-American; 4% Asian or Pacific Islander and 1% are Native or Alaskan American. This cultural diversity reflects the expanding multicultural environment in which the system's 6,660 high school teachers teach.

Chicago public schools are also faced with the task of addressing the needs of low income students in attendance. Currently, approximately 66% of the students (elementary and high school combined), are classified as low income (Chicago Tribune, 1990).

THE PENDULUM SWING

School improvement has been a reoccurring theme throughout the history of Chicago public schools. What is currently regarded as school reform is a continuation of the efforts of various community groups, concerned parents, legislators, teachers, and administrators to improve the quality of management, curriculum, and instruction at the local schools (Tyack and Hansot, 1984).

Public high schools in Chicago were founded in 1856 as an act to improve the school system which existed during that time. As Stayer (1932) noted, ... "That, for the improvement of the system of public schools now existing in this city and the elevation of the Grammar and Primary Schools, a High School shall be established, and a building for the same erected."

Chicago high schools were established around the same time other high schools were established in various parts of the United States (Herrick, 1971; Stayer, 1932). The major purposes of secondary schools were derived from two primary factors: The conditions of modern life (Civil War-Industrial Age) and the needs of adolescent youth.

The goals of education in 1856 focused on the development of critical thinking which would prepare the students to contribute to the building and growth of our yet young nation. In 1932, Chicago high schools changed their focus again. "The aims and objectives of high school training have been distinctly liberalized. Instead of 'mental discipline' (1856) or 'fitting students for college

entrance' (1893), the present high schools students have a set of aims known as the Seven Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education", which reflected the emphasis on the social development of students into the larger society (Stayer, 1932).

The first high school in Chicago began with 114 students taught by four teachers. By 1893, there were 12 high schools with 5,382 students in attendance, receiving instruction from 189 teachers. In 1932, almost forty years later, the students population had grown to 100,856 students in 24 high schools employing 3,208 teachers.

Chicago public high schools have been wrestling with several basic issues since their inception in 1856. These issues include Board of Education and Superintendent conflicts; the intrusion of city politics and corruption; the misuse and mismanagement of educational funds; poor working conditions for teachers and principals; and poor facilities in which to stimulate students to learn, notwithstanding the problems of high student absenteeism and poor academic achievement (Counts, 1971; Herrick, 1971; Stayer, 1932; Tyack and Hansot, 1984; Veig, 1939).

Today, Chicago public high schools continue their uphill struggle to achieve educational quality and equality for their students and professionals. Faced with the reoccurring issues of the past which are now cloaked in the vernacular and ideologies of current events, local high

school personnel are realizing, albeit slowly, that this "Goliath" has to be confronted and tackled.

PUBLIC SCHOOL REFORM: CHICAGO STYLE

The school improvement plan concept described in the reform act, PA85-1418, emanated from the Urban School Improvement Act of 1985 (PA84-749), which established Local School Improvement Councils (LSIC) and voluntary participation in developing school improvement planning.

Chicago's present school improvement planning process is mandated and comprised of twenty specific goals which must be addressed, if applicable, within each local school plan (see appendix A). According to the law, the purpose of the school improvement plan is to "reflect the overriding purpose of the attendance center to improve educational quality (PA85-1418, 1989). In an effort to facilitate the local school improvement planning process, the Chicago Public Schools Department of Research, Planning and Evaluation developed and published a suggested format which was distributed to local school council members and various school personnel.

Each local school improvement plan develops a three-year long range plan that should include goals for the educational program in general; and specific goals for 1) attendance and achievement; 2) an assessment of the strength and weaknesses of the school; 3) evidence of equal opportunity for education to all students enrolled at the

school; 4) improved working conditions for teachers; and 5) the development of a monitoring system to ascertain the effectiveness of the implementation of the plan.

Local school improvement planning requires input from the entire school community, ideally. It was requested that each local school hold two public meetings per year to provide the opportunity for community input into the improvement plan.

Critical to a well developed school improvement plan is an adequate and well-thought out budget. Schools receive their money in a lump sum, based on several factors: student enrollment, special needs of students, square footage (for maintenance allocation), and other factors such as desegregation, overcrowding, etc. The Comprehensive Planning Guide for School Improvement provides directives which assist schools in the development of their local school budget and provides a perspective on the relationship of the budget to the school improvement plan (See appendix B).

Many high schools are fortunate enough to be recipients of funds and resources from public and private sources that are interested in school reform. Some high schools receive these extras from special projects such as the CANAL project, a comprehensive desegregation model. Other community organizations, agencies, and local universities have provided training to the schools and their councils and

parents. Outside of the schools, reform fever is high. What's happening inside of the high schools?

In year one of Chicago public school reform, the high schools were faced with attempting to decide how to attack persistent and often overwhelming concerns in their environments. At the high school level, problems occurred which related to gang activity, selling and taking drugs, sexual activity, teen pregnancy, role confusion among adolescents, and dropping out of school. With regard to many of these issues, high schools drafted their plans of action.

A LOOK INSIDE THE HIGH SCHOOLS' IMPROVEMENT PLANS

During the summer of 1990, the improvement plans submitted were reviewed by a group of persons from varied personal and professional backgrounds. The group developed a format for assessing the various mandated and innovative aspects of each plan. In addition, almost one-half of the plans were analyzed in more detail.

The purpose of this task force was to read the plans and identify to what extent schools actually addressed each goal in their plans, and to obtain an idea of how schools generally perceived change as expressed in their plans. However, for the schools, this was no easy task. They were pushed into a hectic whirlwind of deadlines: electing local school council members (October, 1989); receiving training (ongoing 1989-90); developing and submitting a budget (by

March, 1990); and in half of the schools, selecting a principal (by April, 1990)-- all of these activities in addition to the development of a school improvement plan, which was due in May of 1990. It is evident that the schools were under tremendous pressure to complete these tasks in addition to maintaining their usual routines in the education of children and the management of the schools.

Although at times difficult, the reviewers of the plans remained objective when reading the plans. The review format was comprised of three major sections: 1) adequacy of the Plan, 2) quality of the Plan, and 3) comments. The adequacy and quality of the plans summarized the twenty goals and the overall reform initiatives. The comment section noted specific observations not expressed in the aforementioned sections (see appendix C).

Approximately 80% of the high school plans were turned in by the time the task force began reviewing the plans in June. Most (68%) of the plans were deemed complete by the district superintendent, who was required to review the plans submitted.

The twenty mandated goals have been categorized in this paper into five topics to facilitate the discussion of the content of the plans. The topics are as follows:

ACADEMIC GOALS: #1. Student achievement; #5. Common Learning Experience; #8. Athletic Programs/School Identification; #11. International Studies; #12. Fine and Performing Arts; and #13. Special Needs Programs

STUDENT SELF-DISCIPLINE AND MOTIVATION GOALS: #2. Student Attendance; #3. Student Graduation Rate; #4.

Student Retention Rate; #7. Reduction in Class Size; and #15. Student-Counselor Ratio

HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITION GOALS: #9. Transition to Employment; #10. Transition to Higher Education; and #14. State Board of Higher Education Requirements

TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM: #16. Staff Development; and #17. Teacher Authority over Instruction

PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT GOALS: #18. Parental involvement; #19. Parent Training; and #20. Community Involvement

ACADEMIC GOALS

Goal 1 requires the schools to develop plans that would provide strategies to improve achievement scores in reading, mathematics, science, and higher order thinking. The legislation requires proof of improvement through increased standardized test scores. Thus far, on the Illinois state reading exam (1990), which is given in 3rd, 6th, 8th, and 11th grades, 90% of the 11th graders scored below the state average (Chicago Tribune, 1990).

Overall, The high schools planned to address this goal in several ways. Twenty percent (20%) of the schools proposed workshops and inservice training for teachers in various subject areas. Forty-three percent (43%) planned to train staff to develop more effective ways of interpreting and using test results. In the areas of restructuring test methods, 17% of the high schools planned to use this strategy. Other ideas such as re-examining textbooks and instructional materials, increasing students' time-on-task,

and teaching test-taking skills to students were also suggested in the plans.

Within the subject areas, the high schools addressed Goal 1 in various ways. For reading, many schools (43%) planned to use computers; other schools (23%) plan to use special laboratories and peer tutoring. Some schools (30%) plan to review or revise their reading curriculum. Other more specific ideas for reading included the development of drama classes, including one entitled "Tragedy", which would trace dramatic form from the Greek Theatre to the present. Another idea was to incorporate an intergenerational reading program that included people of all ages from the surrounding community.

Only 71% of the plans addressed the writing subgoal of Goal 1. Again, using computers was among the most popular strategy. Other ideas included integrating writing skills throughout the curriculum and developing writing labs.

For the mathematics subgoal, the plans reflected a desire to increase flexibility. Various schools expressed the need to allow students who failed Algebra I the first semester to repeat it second semester. Another idea was to expand course offerings in mathematics. Classes such as technical, vocational, and informal mathematics were planned. Many schools also emphasized upgrading basic skills.

In the area of science, ideas were sparse in most high school plans, if any were written at all. Some school plans

included the restructuring their science class offerings to include more courses which were focused on vocational and technical preparation. One school created a hall of science with murals depicting various eras of scientific development. Another school developed a laboratory safety program, where all of the students would be required to score 100% before they could do laboratory work.

Addressing the higher order thinking skills subgoal of Goal 1 posed a challenge to the high schools as well as the elementary schools. It is rare that students are able to engage in free expression of ideas and the supporting of their ideas and opinions in the classroom. However, close to one-half of the high schools addressed this goal in some manner; the objectives and activities the schools wrote for this part were vague at times. For example, a school is planning to integrate higher-order thinking skills into science, mathematics and English by having each department develop test items for teachers to use when constructing tests, featuring questions which tap higher-order thinking skills.

In addition to these required subject area objectives of Goal #1, a few schools included ideas for social studies, two examples were the development of a living history component and integrating mathematics and geography.

Few high schools (30%) addressed common learning experiences for all students (Goal #5) for various reasons. One of the primary reasons pointed to the ambiguity in the

letter of the law. However, some schools approached this goal by planning for interdisciplinary and multicultural studies. Schools with an overwhelming majority of African-American students planned to implement an African-centered or Afro-centric curriculum.

High school plans for Goal #8 i.e., athletic programs which "encourage pride, positive identification with the attendance center and reduce dropouts and delinquency"¹ seemed partially vague. Of the high schools that addressed this goal, the focus was primarily on activities that were directly related to health and athletics, leaving the pride, positive identification, and reduction of dropouts and delinquency implied or non-existent.

Most high schools had well established physical education programs and extracurricular sports activities long before the passage of the reform act. Perhaps, many schools felt satisfied with their existing programs or felt this goal was not a priority. However, a few schools had developed interesting athletic activities for their students. One school proposed the development of an Adventurers' Athletic Club which included activities of hiking, canoeing, and climbing, in addition to the usual sports program. Another school developed classes in tap and square dancing.

Foreign language opportunities (Goal #11) and fine and performing arts and journalism (Goal #12) had been established in the high schools for some time. College-

bound students must successfully complete two years of a foreign language, and all students must complete one year of art and one year of music before they are eligible for graduation. Despite the high percentage of schools that did not address these goals (70% for foreign language and 66% for the arts), some schools did submit interesting ideas and activities. One school planned to obtain a satellite dish and five computers which would enable the students to communicate to other parts of the world, particularly to countries whose dominant languages are French or Spanish. Another school planned to develop interdisciplinary teaching methods between mathematics and music. It was also noted that one school planned to introduce dance classes, but wrote this idea into goal 8, instead of goal 12. Often in high schools, dance is included under physical education instead of the performing arts.

Providing sufficient staff and facility resources for children with special needs (Goal #13) will prove to be a problem for certain areas of special needs education. Some schools, however, will receive some monetary relief through federal ESEA Chapter 1 and state Chapter 1 programs. Funds for these programs are used to provide supplementary instruction to students with the greatest educational need. Few high school plans addressed this portion of the goal, although there are many high schools receiving funds from these programs.

Schools with special education and bilingual programs faced difficulties, especially bilingual education, from the severe lack of qualified personnel to teach the classes. For special education, few high school plans addressed specific ways to improve their existing programs. However, one school developed an "Intervention Teacher Program" which integrated the skills of special educators with the regular English and Algebra I teachers in their respective classrooms; Learning disabled students were taught with their "mainstream" peers.

The limited number of ideas found in the high school plans pertaining to bilingual programs illustrates the complexity of dealing with the issue of bilingual education. Of the over 6,600 high school teachers , less than 1% are Native American, 2% are Asian and about 3.5% are Hispanic. Although there are African and European-American teachers who are bilingual, many schools have serious problems finding teachers who can meet the needs of the approximately 12,400 bilingual high school students.

Only one high school addressed the provision of education for four year olds (Goal #6) , therefore this goal was omitted from analysis. Most high schools didn't view this goal as appropriate for their grade levels.

STUDENT SELF-DISCIPLINE AND MOTIVATION GOALS

High schools have been searching for effective ways and have experimented with myriad of projects and programs to

reduce absenteeism and failures for over a century (Havinghurst, 1964; Herrick, 1971; Stayer, 1932).

Currently, barely 50% of Chicago high school freshmen graduate in four years. The dropout rate for the class of 1988 was 40% with comparable rates among African-Americans (41%), European-Americans (37%), and Hispanic-Americans (44%). Native Americans, who have the lowest high school student enrollment, had the highest dropout rate (68%). Asian-Americans had the lowest dropout rate overall (15%). The male dropout rate (45%) is higher than the female dropout rate (35%).

Several indicators seem to be reliable predictors of high school dropouts. They are entry age to high school (15 years old or over) and perform at or under an eighth grade reading level. Grade retention also plays a significant role in predicting a potential dropout.

School programs often compete against after-school jobs, drug usage, teen pregnancy, and gangs for student attention and commitment. These activities, whether productive or non-productive, present real challenges for schools to find solutions and alternatives which increase educational achievement among students.

Goals #2- student attendance (91%), and #3- student graduation rates (70%), were two of the mandates most frequently included in the high school plans. Ideas written for Goal #2 included the incorporation of model programs such as TAP-ONE (Truants Alternative Program-On Needs Early)

and the use of awards and incentives, which were used in about 70% of the plans. For Goal #3, many schools focused on targeting ninth and tenth grade students for dropout prevention programs involving strategies such as articulation with feeder schools, dropout identification, and intervention.

Other schools proposed building stronger relationships between school and home, (e.g. creating alumni associations, lowering student-counselor ratio, and adding group guidance programs). About 60% of the high schools addressed Goal #4- student grade retention, and about 50% addressed goal #15- student-counselor ratio). A few high schools proposed homework centers and five week progress reports for Goal #4. Goal #15 focused on activities such as group guidance. A major concern for this goal was who would fund the counseling position.

Goal #7, reduction in class size, was addressed by less than 10% of the high schools. Many schools felt that class size is set under union contract, therefore this issue is beyond their authority. This goal was addressed more frequently by the elementary schools, although the class size stipulations listed in the union contract (1989-90) are similiar to high school numbers.

HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITION

Goals pertaining to preparing high school students for college, work and adult life are also influenced and

affected by the goals listed under the previous two categories of goals. Overall these goals seemed to be difficult for many high schools to address, with the exception of Goal #9, which was addressed by at least 75% of the schools.

Goal #15- student-counselor ratio, played an important role in addressing Goals 9, 10, and 14. In many plans, high schools decided to expand the role of the counselor to include more career counseling and also to take another look at their current counseling programs. Some schools intended to create work-study and career awareness programs. Others looked to outside help such as adopt-a-school businesses, parent involvement, and community businesses. A few schools, especially the technical and vocational schools planned to increase offerings in vocational and technical classes.

The high schools seemed to have had more difficulty developing ideas for Goals 10 and 14. About 40% of the schools addressed Goal 10, and only 20% addressed Goal 14. Goal 10, (transition to higher education), was very dependent upon the structure and focus of the academic program and students' attitude toward learning. Therefore, most of the schools that addressed the plans were college preparatory. However, very little innovation or creative initiative was noted. One school, however, had plans for a Super Parents Scholarship Fund for deserving students, and

another school planned exit interviews by faculty members for senior class members.

Goal 14 (State Board of Higher Education college entrance requirements) probably presented the greatest challenge to the high schools. Already confronted with at least a 40% low income student population in nearly half of the high schools and a 50% dropout rate, the average high school seemed more concerned about preparing students for employment after high school, rather than college. In addition, most Chicago public high school students' ACT scores fell below the national norms (Chicago Tribune, 1990). Coupled with the current inadequate high school graduation requirements in the system, it will take more than an idea in the school improvement plans to address this goal effectively.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Less than 50% of the schools addressed Goal 16 (staff development and less than 40% addressed Goal 17 (Teacher Authority in Instruction). From the task force, it is difficult to determine the extent to which teachers participated in the planning process. However, schools involved in the CANAL project were already using shared-decision making strategies. Few high schools, if any, actually stated intentions to grant teachers authority to decide instructional priorities and methods of teaching. Teacher involvement was primarily limited to contributing to

the school improvement plans, attending in-services either chosen by them or the principal, and attending conferences outside of the schools.

PARENT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

About 70% of the high schools addressed Goal 18 (parent involvement) contrasted to 30% for Goal 19 (parent training) and 40% for Goal 20 (community involvement). Ways in which schools planned to involve parents included a Super Parents Club at one high school; hiring parents as teaching aides in another plan; and increasing parent visitations for conferences and meetings. Again schools that were affiliated with the CANAL project seemed to have had a greater role for parent participation. Other ideas written were to create a parent newsletter, and the development of parent volunteer programs.

Parent training (Goal 19) ideas were rare. However, one school did plan a parent orientation program. Community involvement (Goal 20) was usually addressed in terms of ideas for participation of businesses. Businesses and community organizations, such as Illinois Bell, Citicorp, and Sara Lee, were seen as resources or as Adopt- A- School sponsors.

*DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS: THE IMPACT OF YEAR 1 OF CHICAGO
PUBLIC SCHOOL REFORM ON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' LEARNING*

"I must show the school as it really is.
I must not attack the school, nor talk overmuch about
what ought to be, but only about what it is."²

Willard Waller

One of the primary purposes of the Chicago school reform act was to improve student learning. This review of the legislation and the school improvements plans can be better discussed first from an examination of the past and present social and political influences, and educational practices which have affected high school students' behavior, and performance.

SOCIAL INFLUENCES

The primary functions of schools in the United States have been to serve the needs of society. Socioeconomic fluctuations have influenced the agendas of educational systems throughout our history (Bidwell and Friedkin, 1986; Cuban, 1984; Stayer, 1932; Tyack and Hansot, 1984).

Generally, Americans thought that schools were the instruments of social improvement with the underlying assumption that individual progress through education translated into a better society. Max Weber (1946) and Emile Sorokin (cited in Bidwell and Friedkin, 1987), prominent European sociologists, viewed schools as vehicles for social status mobility. Sorokin (1927) further viewed common or public schools' objective as the "machinery of the

aristocratization and stratification of society" and not the instrument of true democracy.

Chicago public schools enroll students (66%) who come from a primarily low socioeconomic background. Eighty-eight percent of the students are minority. Our society has been struggling with rapidly expanding technology and global communications. We are again faced, as in the 1880's, the 1920-30's, and the 1960-70's with major societal changes (Bidwell and Friedkin, 1987; Cuban, 1984; Tyack and Hansot, 1984). Chicago, in conjunction with the state of Illinois has responded by legislating power to majority parent and community local school councils housed in a newly decentralized bureaucracy. Now, it is in the hands of local school communities to make decisions about student progress. Local citizens can determine what goals are most desirable for high school students, or so it seems.

POLITICAL INFLUENCES

Chicago's school reform act PA85-1418 is a document which, though unseemingly to some, is laden with all kinds of social control mechanisms. To the average parent, the law is very acceptable. For example, schools are required to compute a percentage increase in student test scores and attendance per year; the law provided virtually no additional funds to schools (only \$1500 per LSC for training). The deadlines imposed on the schools during the

first year of reform were strongly reminiscent of Cinderella's stepmother.

Chicago city and board of education politics have yet to favor the interests of school personnel and its students. Historical accounts (Counts, 1971; Havinghurst, 1964; Herrick, 1971; Stayer, 1932), have illustrated and discussed struggle after struggle. Such accounts suggest the lack of concern politicians and politics have for education.

The language of this law has been written in vague, general and at times ambiguous terms, which made it difficult for many council members, teachers, and principals to understand how some of the school improvement plan goals (5, 10, and 14 in particular) would be written. Many high schools honestly attempted to write a meaningful school improvement plan. Conversely, a significant number of plans showed little effort to submit a completed plan; some schools seemed to have just turned something in, regardless of the quantity or quality of content, in order to meet a deadline that competed in priority with at least five other reform initiatives.

EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

"The goals of real teaching are being placed in jeopardy by current reforms that try to leap from symptoms of poor educational quality to standardized fixes, with little understanding of the tendency of such fixes to reinforce the very problems at the root of what's wrong with our schools"³ Linda McNeil

Despite teacher union involvement in the writing of the legislation, Chicago public educators were virtually omitted from having any real voice and authority in local school policy and decision making.

Authority was to be given to teachers to determine how they wanted to teach in their classrooms and were to be provided appropriate staff development programs. Few high schools, however, seemed to realize the significance of these initiatives (Goals 16 and 17), and few addressed them in their plans.

Although there has been student-centered instruction throughout the course of American educational history, which has been shown to be quite effective, teacher-centered instruction and the almighty textbook persist. Throughout the plans, the usage of textbooks dominated. Kliebard (1989) stated that the degree of success in changing teaching practices was limited by the seeming impenetrability of particular instructional practices such as recitations and teaching directly from the textbook. Duffy and Roehler (1986: cited in Richardson, 1990), observed that getting teachers to change their practices is difficult in particular, they resist complex, longitudinal changes as opposed to change in management routines, or temporary changes.

Chicago public school teachers have been reluctant to become involved in Board of Education initiatives because they are all too often not included in the planning process.

The assumed role of high school teachers has been to prepare students for either employment or college. Chicago public high school curriculum primarily focus on meeting those objectives. However, is preparation for a job or college the primary purpose for education in high school?

Tracking students is another practice that persists, especially in high schools. This practice, seems to perpetuate the notion of the high schools as a social class sorter (Bidwell and Friedkin, 1987). Once a student is placed in a particular track, it is difficult to move out of it, especially if the placement is in one of the lower tracks.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING PROCESS: ISSUES AND INSIGHTS

In spite of the tremendous pressures Chicago high schools experienced, the majority of them submitted a school improvement plan by the time the task force began their review in June.

Overall, the plans, whether authored primarily by the principal or collaboratively, reflected an initial attempt to address school reform. It would be unrealistic to expect a drastic improvement in the schools, considering the past and existing problems in many public high schools.

The primary purpose of schooling had been established by the State of Illinois to transmit knowledge and culture "through which children learn in areas necessary to their continuing development..." (PA85-1418, 1989). The

legislation further outlines educational reform in terms of percentage increase in achievement test scores, attendance, and graduation rates and percentage decrease in student failures.

The school improvement plan was designated by law to be the instrument to improve the educational quality in each local school. The principal was made responsible for the development of the plan with the assistance of teachers, other LSC members, parents and the community residents.

The school improvement planning process (see appendix D) seems to be the controlling factor of local school activities, i.e., the school improvement planning process includes and affects the local school policy and decisions made and the development of the budget. The 20 goals, translated from the state legislation by the Chicago Board of Education, provided ways to include all of the local school constituents.

Year 1 of school improvement planning was successful primarily because the schools, their councils and teachers helped the principals, in many cases, to meet the imposed deadlines. However, if school improvement is to progress, the Board of Education, Chicago Teachers' Union and state legislators will have to reflect on their role in relation to the local school constituents regarding the notion of school reform. This is crucial for both elementary and high schools, but the purpose of elementary education seems to be better understood. The educational goals of the high school

continues to be vague. Therefore, before any real change can occur, the role of high school should be made clear to all, including the students. Although many high school plans contained vision statements, which defined a purpose for preparing high school students for the future, few plans contained descriptions of comprehensive programs which would help implement the goals of their vision.

The future of the school improvement plan as a vehicle for educational progress and change in Chicago public high schools hinges on whether certain issues are confronted and addressed. These issues emanate from the problem of making the school improvement plan a "living document", i.e. putting policy into practice, at each local school. These issues are: 1) the development of fundamental purposes and goals of high school education which encompass the life of the total student;

2) looking at the problem of change in "approachable human terms", (Sarason, 1971);

3) developing a partnership between governing and regulatory agencies (state, local, teachers' union) and the local schools by ridding the system of the "bureaucratic mentality";

4) developing strategies which insure input into the school improvement plan from all factions involved in the education of the students, including the students.

5) providing teachers and administrators with the support and means to facilitate change through their own development- personally and professionally.

If school reform in Chicago is to succeed, the Board of Education, the state educational agencies, the principals' association, teachers' union and local schools must work to bridge the gulf between policy and practice (Darling-Hammond and Wise, 1985: cited in Richardson, 1990), that inhibits a greater understanding of the actual conditions where teaching and learning take place.

Reflecting on the structure and content of the legislation itself, was PA85-1418 constructed to address the aforementioned long term needs of the Chicago Public School System? Given the internal and externally imposed constraints on the teaching and learning process within the school system, the conflict inherent in change is just beginning to surface.

To answer my own question, it is very doubtful that the language and content of the legislation as it is now written is clear, coherent and inclusive enough to allow for long term, comprehensive change in Chicago public schools. At this point I believe that the legislation needs reviewing and rewriting to provide a more realistic vision of what public schools in Chicago can really be. "Students must leave school with the passion to question, without the fear of looking foolish, and with the knowledge to learn where and how the facts can be found."⁴ (Grant Wiggins)

FOOTNOTES

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2. Cuban, Larry (1984). *How Teachers Taught: Constancy and Change in American Classrooms 1890 - 1980.* N.Y.: Longman Press.
3. Mc Neil, Linda (1988). *Contradictions of Control, Pt. 1: Administrators and Teachers.* Phi Delta Kappan 69,5.
4. Wiggins, Grant (1989). *The Futility of Trying to Teach Everything of Importance.* Educational Leadership; 47,3.

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REVIEW OF 1990-1991 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANS

School name:

Unit No:

Reviewer:

Adequacy of the plan

How well done? Well Adequately Inadequately Not done	Was it done clearly? Yes No	Is it feasible? Yes No
---	---	---------------------------------

Does the plan: assess the current situation?

envision the future state?

sketch route from here to there?

estimate costs?

estimate resources?

specify monitoring procedures?

How does the plan address:

teaching or learning of academic skills?

teaching or learning of non-academic skills?

strengthening teachers' teaching?

strengthening parents' advisory and leadership capacities?

strengthening schools' administrative capacity?

strengthening non-teaching staff's capacities?

fostering shared decision-making?

improvement of the instructional program at the school?

improvement of the organizational context of the school?

improvement of the social environment of the school?

improvement in the physical condition of the school?

strengthening the school as a community institution?

Plan's quality

Yes,
clear

Yes,
vague

No

Sense of purpose

Sense of vision

Sense of completeness

Sense of planning

Sense of group commitment

Sense of meaningfulness

Sense of reform

Is the plan
pro forma?

Yes No

Comments:

APPENDIX C

GOALS FOR THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

STUDENT PERFORMANCE

GOAL 1.

Students achieve proficiency in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and higher-order thinking so that their averages equal or surpass national norms.

By the conclusion of the 1993-94 school year, at least 50 percent of all students—regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or income status—in each attendance center within the district score at or above the national norm on a standardized test.

GOAL 2.

Students attend school regularly.

The average daily student attendance rate within the district in each of the 1989-90, 1990-91, 1991-92, 1992-93, and 1993-94 school years exceeds by at least one percent the average daily student attendance rate within the district for the immediately preceding school year.

GOAL 3.

Students graduate from high school at such rates that the district average equals or surpasses the national norm. (High schools only.)

The percentage of entering freshmen who four years later graduate from 12th grade from each high school attendance center within the district in each of the 1989-90, 1990-91, 1991-92, 1992-93, and 1993-94 school years exceeds by at least five percent the percentage of similar students graduating from that high school attendance center in the immediately preceding school year.

GOAL 4.

Percentage of students within the district failing and not advancing to the next higher grade or graduating, by the conclusion of the 1993-94 school year, is at least 10 percent less than the percentage of students within the district failing and not advancing to the next higher grade or graduating at the conclusion of the 1987-88 school year.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

GOAL 5.

Students are, to the maximum extent possible, provided with a common learning experience that is of high academic quality and that reflects high expectations for all students' capacities to learn.

GOAL 6.

Education services are, to the extent possible, provided for all eligible four-year-old children, using available categorical funds.

GOAL 7.

Class size is reduced to as near the state average as possible, with priority on kindergarten through third grade, considering other school needs as determined by the local school council.

GOAL 8.

Students are provided adequate athletic programs that encourage pride and positive identification with the attendance center and that reduce the number of dropouts and teenage delinquents.

GOAL 9.

Students are adequately prepared for and aided in making a successful transition to employment.

GOAL 10.

Students are adequately prepared for and aided in making a successful transition to further education and life experiences.

GOAL 11.

Students are better prepared to compete in the international market place by having foreign language proficiency and stronger international studies.

GOAL 12.

Student awareness of, interest in, and exposure to fields such as journalism, drama, art, music, dance, and visual arts are increased in such a manner that creative expression and response to the artistic expression of others are fostered.

GOAL 13.

Sufficient staff and facility resources will be provided for students with special needs—including students eligible for federal Chapter 1, state Chapter 1, bilingual education, and special education, as well as students with special needs that are not served in the regular classroom.

GOAL 14.

High school students are offered all courses necessary to comply with the State Board of Higher Education's college entrance criteria effective in 1993, and the percentage of students taking and successfully completing such courses increases. (High schools only.)

GOAL 15.

Student-counselor ratio of 250 to 1 is established in the high schools and at least one counselor is placed in every elementary school.

STAFF

GOAL 16.

All school staff and volunteers are provided an appropriate staff development program that is tied to the priority goals, objectives, and activities specified in the plan.

GOAL 17.

Individual teachers are granted the professional authority to make decisions about instruction and the method of teaching.

PARENTS AND COMMUNITY

GOAL 18.

Parental involvement in the education of their children is increased.

GOAL 19.

Parents are provided training as to how they can assist children at home in preparing them to learn effectively.

GOAL 20.

Participation and support of community residents, business organizations, and other local institutions and individuals is increased.

NOTE:

The Local School Councils and the Board of Education may add additional goals. Numbering for additional goals should start at 21. It is necessary that the plan list all the mandated goals with the goal numbers used in this guide. The goals that the planning team decides not to address, or that are not applicable, can be so indicated.

BUDGET WORKSHEET

SCHOOL YEAR 19__-19__

This worksheet may be useful in preparing the budget for computer entry and showing planned expenditures by program number within funding categories. Note: Not all items apply to all funding categories; follow specific guidelines provided by each funding source.

Funding Category _____ Fund No. _____ Project No. _____

Program Name _____ Program No. _____

(Insert here the percentage of the total dollars on this worksheet supporting designated goals. If the total amount is allocated to a single goal, the percentage will be 100 percent.)

Related School Improvement Plan Goal(s) _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____

Percentage of total dollars allocated to above goals _____% _____% _____% _____%

Related Subplan Goal (if applicable) _____

STAFF

Goal No.	Description	Obj.#	No.	Salary & Fringe	Annual Amount
TEACHER					
_____	_____	5110	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
_____	_____	5110	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
_____	_____	5110	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
_____	_____	5110	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
_____	_____	5110	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____

CAREER SERVICE

_____	_____	5210	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
_____	_____	5210	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
_____	_____	5210	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
_____	_____	5210	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
_____	_____	5210	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____

Goal No.	Description	Obj.#	No.	Days/Hours	Rate	Annual Amount
EXTENDED DAY BUCKET						
_____	Teacher	5113	_____	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
_____	Career Service	5213	_____	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____

SUBSTITUTE TEACHER BUCKET

_____	_____	5150	_____	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
_____	_____	5150	_____	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____

Goal No.	Description	Obj.#	No.	Days/Hours	Rate	Annual Amount
CONTRACTED CONSULTANT AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES						
_____	Parent Stipends	5411	_____	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
_____	Staff Development	5410	_____	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
_____	Pupil Services	5400	_____	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
_____	Consultants	5410	_____	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
_____	Tutors	5410	_____	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
_____	Stipends	5411	_____	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
STAFF SUBTOTAL						\$ _____

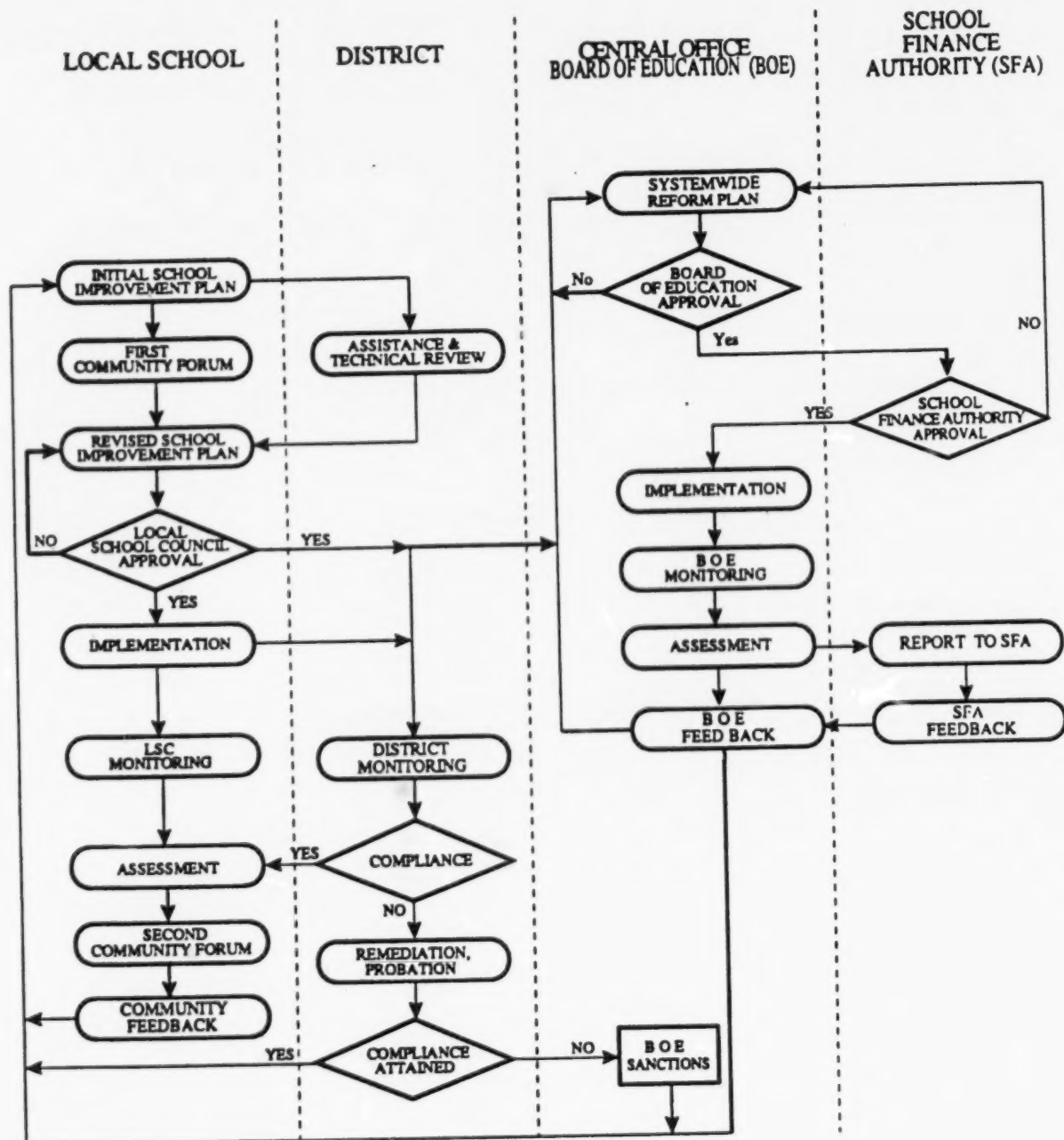
NONSTAFF

(Attach itemized list if applicable; include shipping & handling)

Goal No.	Description	Obj.#	Annual Amount
_____	Textbooks/Instructional Materials	5310	\$ _____
_____	Supplies	5320	\$ _____
_____	Postage	5390	\$ _____
_____	Printing	5460	\$ _____
_____	Equipment/Furniture (attach list)	5730	\$ _____
_____	Repair Contracts/Maintenance Agreements (work orders)	5470	\$ _____
_____	Equipment Rental	5440	\$ _____
_____	Student Transportation	5510	\$ _____
_____	Carfare	5520	\$ _____
_____	Admissions	5420	\$ _____
_____	Food	5340	\$ _____
_____	Rental of Space	5480	\$ _____
_____	Conference Travel	5500	\$ _____
_____	Dues/Fees	5420	\$ _____
_____	_____	_____	\$ _____
_____	_____	_____	\$ _____
NONSTAFF SUBTOTAL			\$ _____

TOTAL STAFF AND NONSTAFF FOR THIS PROGRAM NUMBER \$ _____

SYSTEMWIDE PLANNING PROCESS



E. Suggested Timeline for Systemwide Planning

Note: This is a general calendar. There is no school improvement plan for the 1989-90 school year.

September	Initiate implementation and monitoring of current year school improvement plan (school) Initiate implementation and monitoring of current year systemwide reform plan (central office, Board of Education)
November	Conduct first open meeting to review status of current year plan and prepare for the next year's plan. Organize planning group(s); initiate training (school)
December	Initiate needs assessment for next year's plan (school)
January	Review mid-year progress of plan; initiate development of next year's plan (school)
February 15	Develop initial draft of next year's plan (school) Provide assistance and technical review (district superintendent)
February 21	Organize forum for public information and input (school)
March 21	Develop revised draft of next year's plan including expenditure plan; seek LSC approval (school)
May 1	Forward LSC-approved plan to the district superintendent (school)
May	Prepare preliminary systemwide reform plan for next year (central office)
June	Conduct second open meeting to review progress of current year plan and to discuss next year's plan (school)
June 1	Submit preliminary systemwide reform plan to School Finance Authority (SFA) (Board of Education)
June 15	Receive SFA feedback; initiate changes if necessary (central office)
June 30	Prepare revised systemwide plan (central office)
July 15	Submit final systemwide plan to SFA (Board of Education)
July	Assess progress of current year school improvement plan and prepare annual accomplishment report (school)
August	Assess progress on current year systemwide plan and submit annual accomplishment report to SFA (Board of Education)